

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1028

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NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AFSP, APER

SUBJECT: PROPOSAL TO LEAVE EMBASSY UNDER CHARGE D'AFFAIRES UPON
MY DEPARTURE

1. YOUR MOVE IN SENDING SPECIAL PRESIDENTIAL REPRESENTATIVE
TO LEBANON SO PROMPTLY AFTER TRAGIC DEATH OF AMBASSADOR MELOY HAS
BEEN VERY WELL RECEIVED HERE AND OBVIOUSLY WAS EXACTLY THE RIGHT
THING TO DO. (VERY FRANKLY, AT THE TIME I WAS NOT ALTOGETHER
SURE.) I HAVE RECEIVED FAVORABLE COMMENTS ON THIS ACTION FROM BOTH
MOSLEM AND CHRISTIAN LEADERS, AS WELL AS FROM SEASONED DIPLOMATS
(E.G., BRITISH AND GERMAN AMBASSADORS). LOCAL PRESS REACTIONS HAVE
BEEN POSITIVE.

2. IN A DRAMITIC AND DECISIVE WAY THIS MOVE HIGHLIGHTED THE TOP-LEVEL
U.S. INTEREST IN LEBANON AND OUR DETERMINATION NOT TO BE DETERRED
BY THE ASSISSINATIONS. WE HAVE THEREBY BEEN AFFORDED THE OPPORTUNITY
TO KEEP IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH TOP LEBANESE PERSONALITIES AND IN THIS
WAY TO DEMONSTRATE NOT ONLY OUR INTEREST BUT OUR CONTINUED WILLING-
NESS TO BE HELPFUL IN RESOLVING THE CRISIS.

3. I SUGGEST, NEVERTHELESS, THAT WHEN I LEAVE--PRESUMABLY IN A
FEW WEEKS, AFTER HAVING COMPLETED MY "ROUNDS"--YOU MIGHT WISH TO
GIVE CONSIDERATION TO HAVING THIS EMBASSY HEADED UP A LEVEL BELOW
RANK OF AMBASSADOR FOR A PERIOD OF TIME. I SUBMIT THAT EVOLVING
LEBANON SITUATION ARGUES IN FAVOR OF HAVING A CHARGE' D'AFFAIRES,

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RATHER THAN AN AMBASSADOR, IN CHARGE AT THIS JUNCTURE.

4. MY REASONING IS AS FOLLOWS:

A. AT A TIME OF INTENSE FIGHTING, WHICH THREATENS TO EMBROIL WEST BEIRUT, AN AMBASSADOR IS A PARTICULARLY HIGH-PROFILE TARGET. UNFORTUNATELY, AMBASSADORS THESE DAYS--ESPECIALLY AMERICANS-- ARE INFINITELY MORE VULNERABLE TO ATTACK OR OTHER HOSTILE ACTIONS THAN SUBOMSTATE DIPLOMATS. THUS THE MOVEMENTS OF AN AMERICAN AMBASSADOR IN LEBANON IN A SITUATION LIKE THIS ARE SHARPLY CIRCUMSCRIBED. HE HAS TO REMAIN COOPED UP MOST OF THE TIME, AND EVERY TIME HE TRAVELS HE GOES WITH A HIGHLY VISIBLE ARMED ESCORT. EMBASSY SECURITY RESOURCES REQUIRED TO SUPPORT HIM ARE CONSIDERABLE, AND NEGATE EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE STAFF FURTHER.

B. THERE ARE, TO QUOTE THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR, FEW "INTERLOCUTEURS VALABLE." THERE ARE A HANDFUL OF MOSLEM PERSONMLITIES ON THIS SIDE WHOM ONE CAN VISIT, BUT EVENTS HAVE PASSED MOST OF THEM BY. REACHING THE CHRISTIAN SIDE IS AT THE MOMENT IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME,AND CHRISTIAN LEADERS WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE FOR SOME TIME TO BE VIRTUALLY INACCESSIBLE FROM THIS SIDE. SO THERE ARE FEW KEY PEOPLE THE AMERICAN AMBASSADORK CAN TALK TO. A CHARGE OR POLITICAL OFFICER, ON THE OTHER HAND, WOULD HAVE BETTER CHANCES OF CROSSING THE LNE BECAUSE OF THEIR LOWER VISIBILITY.

C. MORE IS EXPECTED OF AN EMBASSY RUN BY AN AMBASSADOR-- FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE WAY OF REPORTING. THIS, IN ADDITION TO GREATER SECURITY REQUIREMENTS, PRECLUDES FURTHER EFFORTS TO CUT DOWN THE STAFF. IN MESSAGE TO EAGLEBURGER (BEIRUT 5853) I HAVE PROPOSED REDUCING EMBASSY STAFF TO 37, BUT IF THERE WERE NO AMBASSADOR HERE I BELIEVE WE COULD CUT ANOTHER FIVE TO TEN POSITIONS. THIS IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP IN MIND AS PROSPOECT OF WORSENING SITUATION IN WEST BEIRUT LOOMS AHEAD AND EVACUATION BECOMES MORE OF A POSSIBILITY.

D. A YOUNGER OFFICER WITH APPRPRIATE QUALIFICATIONS, PREFERABLY INCLUDING MIDDLE EAST EXPERIENCE,COULD HANDLE THE CHARGE JOB. RAY HUNT AND I HAVE WHIPPED THE EMBASSY INTO SHAPE, AND WE HAVE LARGELY A FRESH TEAM WHOSE MEMBERS KNEW WHAT THEY WERE GETTING INTO WHEN THEY CAME HERE. SO MORALE PROBLEMS SHOULD BE MINIMAL.

E. MOST DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS HERE ARE WITHOUT AMBASSADORS. GERMAN AMBASSADOR HAS LEFT, PROBABLY FOR GOOD. BRITISH AMBASSADOR IS GOING FOR AN EXTENDED ABSENCE AND CONSIDERATION EVEN BEING GIVEN TO CLOSING EMBASSY. SOVIET AND FRENCH AMBASSADORS ARE
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AMONG FEW WHO ARE HANGING ON, THOUGH FRENCH WILL BE A AWAY FOR COMING MONTH.

5. MY RAPID APPOINTMENT AND ASSIGNMENT HERE, AS INDICATED ABOVE, GAVE JUST THE RIGHT SIGNALS. I DO NOT THINK, HOWEVER, THAT WE UNECESSARILY NEED TO KEEP SOMEONE OF MY RANK HERE CONTINUOUSLY TO SUSTAIN THIS IMPACT. IT WAS KNOWN THAT MY APPOINTMENT WAS TEMPORARY,SO MY DEPARTURE SHOULD SURPRISE NO ONE. WE DO NOT

RPT NOT NEED TO ANNOUNCE THAT WE ARE NOT RPT NOT APPOINTING AN AMBASSADOR RIGHT AWAY. INSTEAD, IF ASKED, WE CAN SAY THAT WE WILL DO SO IN DUE TIME. MEANWHILE THE PERSON WE APPOINT AS DCM RAY HUNT'S SUCCESSOR (LIKE ME, RAY CAME ON "TDY") SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT HE WOULD BE IN CHARGE FOR AN INDEFINITE PERIOD.

6. IF AND AS THE SITUATION IMPROVES, WE SHOULD OF COURSE NAME AN AMBASSADOR PROMPTLY. (I MIGHT NOT PARENTHETICALLY THAT I SEE NO IMPROVEMENT OVER THE HORIZON.) IN THE INTERM, SHOULD YOU NEED TO DO A JOB HERE WHICH REQUIRES A HIGHER LEVEL PERSONALITY, YOU COULD ALWAYS NAME A SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE TO COME OUT TEMPORARILY FOR THIS PURPOSE--PROVIDING OF COURSE YOU CAN GET HIM IN HERE*

7. THE FOREGOING IS IN THE WAY OF A SUGGESTION. YOU MAY HAVE OVERRIDING REASONS FOR WANTING TO KEEP AN AMBASSADOR HERE CONTINUOUSLY. WHATEVER YOU DECIDE, I AM PREPARED TO REMAIN FLEXIBLE REGARDING MY RETURN TO U.S. I DO NOT RPT NOT THINK IT WOULD MATTER IF THERE WERE A GAP BETWEEN MY DEPARTURE AND THE ARRIVAL OF THE NEW AMBASSADOR, SHOULD YOU DECIDE ON THE LATTER.
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